A History
of the Foundation of
Futurism and Preterism

The papacy suffered a major setback through the Reformation. The help of the monastic orders was sought, but they were so decadent that they had lost the respect of the people. The Dominicans and Franciscans, peddling relics and indulgences, had become the butt of ridicule and mockery.

At this crisis Loyola and his companions offered their services, to go wherever the pope should designate, as preachers, missionaries, teachers, counselors, and reformers. A new order was created, authorized in 1540, which infused a new spirit and spread rapidly in Europe. Like a wounded giant, Romanism arose in desperation to recover her lost prestige and shrunken territory.

Their ambitious goal was to become the universal and principal order of the Roman church. Though they took the name Society of Jesus (Jesuits), the Protestants termed them *Jesuwider* (against Jesus).

Their influence was immediately felt. They grew more powerful and comprehensive year by year, employing science, art, culture, politics, foreign missions, trades and industry. They began to preach, as Protestants were accustomed to do, in the streets and marts, coming to be among the most eloquent preachers of the age. The churches were too small to accommodate the multitudes that flocked to hear them. At Rome, they were scattered throughout the various churches. Then they began to spread throughout Italy, Portugal, Germany, and especially Austria and Bavaria. They hemmed in the Protestant movement on all sides. Some cities, such as Ingolstadt and Cologne, opened their doors; others opposed them.

In 1558 Lainez was elected second general of the order. At the Council of Trent he successfully exerted his power and skill in behalf of papal supremacy. The Jesuits became entrenched in universities throughout various countries. They were among the best teachers in the land. Even Protestants began to send their children to them because of the scholastic progress they could make.

The conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism was basic and irreconcilable. The Romanist believed in the authority of the church; the Protestant, in that of the Bible. The one yielded his conscience to the priest; the other to God alone. The Romanist believed in the pope as the visible representative of Christ on earth; the Protestant looked, instead, upon the pope as Antichrist. The one regarded the church—meaning the hierarchy—as the depository of all spiritual truth; the other looked upon the clergy as ministers of the church, not as the church itself. The Romanist, satisfied with the teaching of the church, was content to leave the Bible to the learned; the Protestant, on the other hand, held that it was to be diligently and reverently studied, by all, as the word of God. The one dreaded its spread as tending to heresy; the other multiplied translations as the assurance of soundness, and sought to introduce them to every household. Between the time of Luther's appeal to a general council, in 1518, and the

convening of the Council of Trent in 1545, Bibles in German, Danish, Swedish, Icelandic, and English (Tyndale’s New Testament and Coverdale’s complete Bible) had been published, and the Reformation established in Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, and England.

The two systems stood forth in absolute and irreconcilable opposition at the Council of Trent, where the council expressly condemned what the Reformation taught.

The Council of Trent—beginning in 1545 under Paul III and ending in 1563 under Pius IV—crystallized its actions into decrees that became permanent law of the Catholic church. Reformation truths were there rejected and stigmatized as pestilential heresy. In one sense Trent became the culmination of the Counter-Reformation. It was Rome’s definitive answer to the Reformation.

The molding Jesuit influence was attested to by the fact that the two noted Jesuits, Salmeron and Lainez, who served as the pope’s theologians, and who had been enjoined by Loyola to resist all innovation in doctrine, were invited to preach during the council. They soon ingratiated themselves into the good will of the delegates. And by their unusual knowledge of the fathers, the conclusions of scholastic philosophy, and of Catholic doctrine, they came to wield a preponderant influence in the council.

Jesuits Introduce Futurist Counterinterpretation

For some time following the launching of the Reformation, Roman Catholic leadership carefully avoided exposition of the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse. They seemed unable to parry the force of the incriminating Protestant applications of the prophecies concerning Antichrist, which were undermining the very foundations of the Catholic position. Upon the first outbreak of Luther's antipapal protest two Catholic doctors, Prierias and Eck, in the true spirit of the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517), had boldly reasserted the Lateran theory and declared the papal dominion to be Daniel's fifth monarchy, or reign of the saints, and identified the existing Roman church with the New Jerusalem.

But the reformers, with declarations by pen and voice, forcefully stated that the Papacy was the specified Antichrist of prophecy. The symbols of Daniel, Paul, and John were applied with tremendous effect. Hundreds of books and tracts impressed their contention upon the consciousness of Europe. Indeed it gained so great a hold upon the minds of men that Rome, in alarm, saw that she must successfully counteract this identification of Antichrist with the Papacy, or lose the battle. The Jesuits were summoned to aid in the extremity, and cleverly provided the very method needed both for defense and for attack.

From the ranks of the Jesuits two stalwarts arose, determined to lift the stigma from the Papacy by locating Antichrist at some point where he could not be applied to the Roman church. It was clearly a crisis of major proportions.

Two Conflicting Alternatives Brought Forth

Rome’s answer to the Protestant Reformation was twofold, though actually conflicting and contradictory. Through the Jesuits Ribera, of Salamanca, Spain, and Bellarmine, of Rome, the Papacy put forth her futurist interpretation. Almost simultaneously Alcazar,

Spanish Jesuit of Seville, advanced the conflicting preterist interpretation. These were designed to meet and overwhelm the Historical interpretation of the Protestants. Though mutually exclusive, either Jesuit alternative suited the great objective equally well, as both thrust aside the application of the prophecies from the existing Church of Rome. The one (preterism) accomplished it by making prophecy stop altogether short of papal Rome's career. The other (futurism) achieved it by making it overleap the immense era of papal dominance, crowding Antichrist into a small fragment of time in the still distant future, just before the great consummation. It is consequently often called the gap theory.

According to the Protestants, the vision of Babylon and the supporting Beast is divinely interpreted in chapter 17 of the Apocalypse. It was on this that the Reformers commonly rested their case—the apostate woman, the Roman church; the city, seven-hilled Rome; the many waters, the many peoples; the Beast, the fourth, or Roman beast of Daniel; the sixth head, the Caesars; and the seventh, the popes.

Roman Catholics as well as Protestants agree as to the origin of these interpretations. The Roman Catholic writer G.S. Hitchcock says:

> "The Futurist School, founded by the Jesuit Ribera in 1591, looks for Antichrist, Babylon, and a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, at the end of the Christian dispensation.
> "The Praeterist School, founded by the Jesuit Alcasar in 1614, explains the Revelation by the Fall of Jerusalem, or by the fall of Pagan Rome in 410 A.D." (G.S. Hitchcock, *The Beasts and the Little Horn*, p. 7.)

Similarly, Dean Henry Alford (Protestant), in the "Prolegomena" to his *Greek Testament*, declares:

> "The founder of this system [Futurist] in modern times…appears to have been the Jesuit Ribera, about A.D. 1580." (Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers*, vol. 2, part 2, p. 351 [bottom numbering].)
> "The Praeterist view found no favour, and was hardly so much as thought of , in the times of primitive Christianity. … The View is said to have been first promulgated in anything like completeness by the Jesuit Alcasar … in 1614." (*Ibid*, pp. 348, 349 [bottom numbering].)

Francisco Ribera (1537-1591).

About 1590 Ribera published a 500-page commentary on the Apocalypse, denying the Protestant application of Antichrist to the Church of Rome. Ribera's death at fifty-four halted the preparation of further commentaries. Those that were printed passed through several revised editions—at Salamanca about 1590, Lyons and Antwerp in 1593, Douay in 1612, and Antwerp in 1603 and 1623.

Since its inception his basic thesis has been virtually unchanged. He assigned the first few chapters of the Apocalypse to ancient Rome, in John's own time; the rest he restricted to a literal three and a half year's reign of an infidel Antichrist, who would bitterly oppose and blaspheme the saints just before the second advent. He taught that antichrist would be a single individual, who would rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, abolish Christian religion, deny Christ, be received by the Jews, pretend to be God, and

conquer the world—all in this brief space of three and one half years!

Places Antichrist’s coming at the close of the seals
Places trumpets under the seventh seal
Death of the witness is literal time
Antichrist's persecutions last three and one half years
Judgements upon Rome for ultimate apostasy—in Revelation 17 Ribera admits the woman to be not only pagan Rome but also Rome Christian after a future falling away from the pope. (Francisco Ribera, Sacram Beati Ioannis … Apocalypsin Commentarij, chap. 14, pp. 282, 283).
Repudiates Augustinian earthly millennium
Antichrist’s reign counted by literal days
Babylon is Rome past and future, not present

Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), focused his attack on the year-day principle.

Capitalized on Luther’s hesitation over Apocalypse
Main assault centered on year-day application
Assigns symbols to past and future, thereby eliminating application to the long papal ascendancy of the Middle Ages.
Exploits variations on time of the Antichrist

The heart of Bellarmine’s thesis was both clever and plausible, though deceptive. (1) Antichrist is an individual Jew, and not an apostate Christian system. (2) Therefore the length of his exploits must harmonize with the life period of one man—three and one half literal years, and not 1260 years.

Luis de Alcasar (1554-1613), Spanish Jesuit of Seville.

Made the seals the early expansion of apostolic Christianity
God’s longsuffering, warnings, and punishments were allotted to the Jews
The trumpets were judgments on fallen Judaism
The two witnesses—the doctrine and holy lives of the Christians
After the persecutions Christianity would arise with new glory and convert many Jews
Revelation was the apostolic church, bringing forth the Roman church
The first beast of Revelation 13 declared to be the persecuting arrogance of pagan Rome—the second beast, its carnal wisdom
Revelation 17, the mystical meaning of idolatrous ancient Rome
Revelation 18, its conversion to the Catholic faith

LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic faith of Our Fathers, The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, Vol. 2, Review and Herald, Washington, D.C., 1948, excerpted, pp. 464-532.